

VZCZCXR05999

OO RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHVK RUEHYG

DE RUEHKB #0981 2890900

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

O 150900Z OCT 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAKU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0186

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3087

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1150

UNCLAS BAKU 000981

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM AJ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SITREP#1 10:30AM  
BAKU

REF: A. BAKU 961

1B. BAKU 980

11. (SBU) Azerbaijan's polling stations opened largely on time (08:00 local time) on October 15, with observers noting an orderly process with minimal technical violations or issues, and a slow, steady stream of voters casting ballots. Voting in the presidential election will take place until 19:00, when polling stations will close and counting will begin. Embassy staff, divided into 19 teams, are visiting polling stations in Baku and Azerbaijan's regions, working separately, but in cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR and other international observers. All are accounted for and providing updates on election day activities to Embassy staff in Baku.

12. (SBU) Embassy observers report a large presence of domestic observers in place at polling stations. For the most part, these domestic observers represent political parties, mainly President Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party. Additionally, other domestic observers, representing NGOs, as well as individuals accredited to observe, are participating.

There are no reports of domestic or international observers being denied entrance to polling stations.

13. (SBU) Observers working in conjunction with the Election Monitoring Center (EMC), which is conducting a parallel vote tabulation, are present at polling stations. These observers, which reportedly encountered some resistance or interference ahead of the election, based on association with EMC, are acting in polling stations as individuals, in accordance with Azerbaijani law, rather than as members of the broader group. (Note: EMC was registered as an NGO by the GOAJ last winter, then rashly de-registered in spring. In a court case that followed, the organization was annulled.

Since that time, the GOAJ, at various levels, has assured the Embassy that EMC observers would be able to participate in the election and conduct a parallel vote tabulation as individual citizens of Azerbaijan, but would not be allowed to function as an entity. End Note.) There are no visible signs of EMC activity, e.g. badges or banners. All domestic observers, rather, have credentials issued by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The National Democratic Institute (NDI), which is working with EMC on the parallel vote tabulation, reports that EMC observers were instructed to keep a low profile, presenting individual credentials and not highlighting EMC materials. Presently, indications are that the parallel vote tabulation will precede as planned.

14. (SBU) Several Government-sponsored NGOs (GONGOS) are conducting exit polls at polling stations. Results of the effort appear to be mixed, with reports of inconsistent activity. At several polling stations around the country, exit poll implementers are not approaching voters, and voters

are not approaching them. As a result, exit poll surveys are largely incomplete. At other polling stations, GONGOs appear to be more assertive, requesting voters to fill out the surveys.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy observers thus far report no gross violations or irregularities at polling stations, but have brought to attention minor issues and technical violations. In some regions, police are standing too close to polling stations, though not interfering with voters. At other precincts, election officials have inconsistently applied inking, and several cases of voter registration delays have been reported. In Baku, UK Embassy observers noted that one polling station was suddenly filled with large numbers of voters from a nearby hospital, with individuals presenting de-registration certificates. These certificates allow individuals to vote in precincts outside their home district.

In Nakhchivan, an official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is making himself known near a polling station, perhaps intimidating voters. Embassy has been in contact with the Central Election Commission to discuss issues and areas of concern, and will continue this dialogue.

DERSE